No. 55

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

Betty was no weakling, and she fought with all the desperation of a wild creature driven to bay. It seemed, however, that her struggles were of no avail.

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WITHOUT waiting for a reply, Fredericks rose and touched a bell. The Jap appeared noiseless like a shadow. "A fresh bottle, Toto." The Jap disappeared as noiselessly as he had come. And there was a peculiar smile on his mask-like face as he did his master's bidding.

This was not the first time that he had received a similar order precisely under the same circumstances.

But before he opened the bottle he glanced furtively about, then took a small vial from his pocket.

Into one of the empty glasses on the silver tray he put two drops. As he entered the sitting room he placed the tray on the table, making a sign to his master that was not observed by Jane Wilton.

Fredericks filled the glasses and held one of them out to her.

"Really, I would rather not drink—if it is all the same to you," she protested mildly.

He laughed with well assumed good nature.

"Oh, be a good little sport just for once," he said persuasively. "There is no harm in a drink of wine. We have to celebrate this occasion a little bit, don't we?"

Jane Wilton would have held her ground, but he pressed the glass into her hand.

She touched it with her lips, sipped, then swallowed half of it and wiped her mouth with her bare arm.

"Don't you like it?" he asked, watching her furtively.

"It has a pleasant taste," the girl admitted.

"Then empty your glass."

She did so and leaned back, a sigh escaping her lips.

A minute or two later her cheeks began to burn, and she showed an inclination to talk and laugh.

"That is the way I like to see you," Fredericks

cried, patting her bare shoulder. "And now that we have sealed our friendship in the proper manner, let us arrange a few details in connection with your vocal studies."

But the girl seemed to have lost all desire to indulge in any kind of talk that was of a serious nature. She laughed incessantly.

"If you don't hush, I'll close your lips with a kiss," he threatened.

She laughed again, and his arms were around her the next instant. He kissed her once — twice — three times. Still she laughed.

The wine was doing its work in a most deadly fashion.

"I love you, Jane," a voice said close to her ear.

Again she laughed.

It was the laugh of a girl suddenly under the spell of irresponsibility. And it was the laugh that came like welcome music to the listening beast.

Chapter 179

DISILLUSIONED

THREE DAYS had passed. One of the original ten new girls in training for chorus work was missing. Those who inquired after her were informed that she had been assigned to a road company. But there was one person who was rather skeptical about it, and that person was Betty Procter. She was not yet ready to believe it.

She attempted a personal investigation, but unacquainted as she was in New York, her efforts remained fruitless.

Farrel, the manager assured her that Jane Wilton was making unexpected progress as a chorus girl. And he told this falsehood with such sincerity that finally Betty believed it.

Naturally she was disappointed at Jane's failure to call on her as she had promised to do. But she knew that girls are often called upon to leave at a moment's notice in the theatrical profession.

So taking it for granted that Jane Wilton had been shipped out of the city over night, she appeased her mind, hoping that it was true.

For the next week she applied herself diligently to the studying of her part. In this she received the enthusiastic encouragement of Mr. Farrel. He constantly assured her that she had the making of a splendid emotional actress in her.

One morning, after her rehearsal, she was asked to step into Farrel's office. As she entered she saw a well dressed man, who smoked a big black cigar, seated with

the manager.

He bore all the outward indications of wealth and refinement. And Betty's first impression was that he looked like an actor.

"Miss Procter," Farrel addressed her with a most agreeable smile. "I want you to meet Mr. Jamison—Miss Procter."

Betty advanced a step and bowed.

"Mr. Jamison is the manager of the 'The Shock Punch' company now playing in New York," Farrel explained. "I believe he has something to say to you that will be of interest."

Mr. Jamison cleared his voice.

"Mr. Farrel tells me that you have mastered the part of the leading woman in my play," he said in a voice that was somewhat harsh. "Is that so?"

"I believe I could handle it if I were given the chance," she answered confidently. "I know all the lines perfectly."

"If that is the case, you are a mighty fortunate young woman," Mr. Jamison declared in a jovial tone. "My leading lady has been in ill health for some time. Last night she broke down completely and I must have someone to take her place immediately."

Betty Procter's eyes shone.

"Then you are going to give me a chance?"

"That is what I came here for," came back quickly. "The entire company is to meet at my residence for a special rehearsal at noon. I hope you will be able to rehearse with us."

The girl nodded her acquiescence.

"Yes, sir," she said, fearing that the manager had not seen her nod.

"Very well, then," the latter said, rising. "We don't want to keep the rest of the folk waiting any longer

than is absolutely necessary. Are you ready to go now, Miss Procter."

"I am," Betty replied with alacrity.

In bidding good-by to Farrel, she took occasion to thank him for his kindly interest in her.

Had she not been so engrossed in her thoughts of the immediate future she would have noticed the peculiar smile on his face.

"I shall always think of you, sir," she murmured. "And I'll try my best to make good."

"You'll make good alright, Miss Procter," he replied as he shook her outstretched hand warmly. "I wish you luck."

Farrel accompanied her and Mr. Jamison to the door. At the curb stood a handsome closed car. They climbed into it without further waste of time and the machine started off with a jerk that threw Betty back violently.

She turned back and had a last glimpse at Farrel as he still stood on the door waving his hand.

The car passed through a number of streets lined on both sides with handsome residences. Presently it came to a stop in the front of of a magnificent mansion of gray stone.

There was a broad terrace, lined with tropical plants and a spacious lawn that showed the hand of care.

Betty Procter allowed Mr. Jamison to take her arm, and together they ascended the marble stairs leading to the terrace. As she looked about she noticed that the window curtains were all tightly drawn.

There was nothing out of the ordinary about this, she thought.

Mr. Jamison unlocked the massive front door with a latch key, then drew the girl in after him.

Suddenly Betty stopped dead in her tracks and

stared about.

The rooms she could see from the immense hall were all in semi-darkness. The house was silent as the grave. There was no sign of life anywhere. Surely there was no theatrical troupe here.

Her eyes widened as they rested on the man for a moment. There was a question in them that demanded an answer.

He met her glance and smiled.

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Procter," he said quietly. "The folk are all upstairs in the music room, which is equipped with a small stage. We shall rehearse up there, in a short time."

The girl experienced a sudden tightening sensation about her heart.

For a moment she hesitated, then walked up the heavy carpeted stairs with Mr. Jamison. Through a long dark hall they went, until they came to a door that stood partly open.

Before he could persuade her to enter, she started back with a suppressed scream.

"What is the matter?" he asked unconcerned.

"There is no one here," she gasted, "and this is not a music room."

One glimpse into the luxuriously bedchamber had warned her of the danger ahead. With the first breath of suspicion came also the frightful realization that she had been trapped.

And before she could take another step backward, the man seized her roughly by the arm, forced her to enter, then locked the door.

"You — you," she gasped, tottering against the wall. "Who and what are you?"

Her face was white and tense and her wide eyes stared at him with unspeakable horror. She held out her

hand as if to keep him at bay.

He made no move in her direction, but seemed quite content to stand where he was, contemplating the wonderful charms of her face and figure.

"You are evidently not pleased to be with me alone," he said at length with a little laugh. "I admit it was rather in bad taste to deceive you like this. But all is fair in love and war."

Betty was still groping for adequate words which would not come. She was too stunned to utter a sound.

Finally her terrible fear subsided somewhat, and a wave of deep indignation swept over her.

She was watching the man with alert eyes, prepared for anything—everything.

"Mr. Jamison," she flared up suddenly when he did not speak, "you had no right to entice me into your home under the pretext that you were a theatrical manager. It was cowardly—very cowardly. Your house is deserted and we are alone."

"You are quite right, my dear," he answered with a shrug of his shoulders. "It would be so inconvenient to have servants around right now."

Betty looked helplessly about. He followed her glance.

When she made a break for the door, he intercepted her and flung her back. Then he took the key, which was still in the door, and put it in his pocket.

The girl's eyes wandered toward the window.

"You see, there is no possible chance for you to escape," he remarked coolly and with another laugh. "Come now, be sociable. Won't you have a seat?"

He pointed to a divan as he spoke.

Betty flashed him a withering look of contempt and remained standing.

"You look so uncomfortable standing there," Mr.

Jamison persisted. "You and I are going to have a lengthy chat, so you might as well be seated. Come, what is the use to be prudish. I am not your enemy. I want to be your friend if you will let me."

When the girl still held her position against the wall, an expression of impatience became visible on the man's face.

"Come, won't you?" he said with a frown.

Still she did not move.

Chapter 180

THE UNEXPECTED

JAMISON took a few quick steps forward and attempted to seize the girl. She recoiled with a low cry, but he was not to be avoided so easily. He ran after her as she moved swiftly about the table. Betty, fully realizing the peril she was in, was determined to find some means that would save her.

With a sudden, unexpected motion, she whirled, jerked one of the windows open and cried for help at the top of her voice.

But she might as well have whispered the words, for they went unheard in the constant noise coming from the street.

The next instant the man's arms were around her, and with a muttered oath he forced her into a seat, where she cowered helpless and unnerved.

He closed the window, then faced her.

"I hope you are beginning to realize by this time that you are in my hands, and rather helplessly so," he remarked with a soft laugh. "There is no reason in the world why you should be so terribly afraid of me. I am a very lonesome man and I love pleasant company.

"You are alone and have to work for a living, Miss Procter," he went on, coming a step closer. "You are anxious to make a mark for yourself in the theatrical world. Don't you know that this is not possible for you unless you have the proper backing?

"I can be of assistance to you in more ways than one. I could start a company of my own and make you

my leading woman. Your name will appear in emblazoned letters on Broadway within a week if you say so.

"Now try and think this over. Be reasonable. Many a girl would jump at the chance I am offering you. Surely there is no harm in my sincere desire to be your friend.

"And you are not the first actress I started on the road to success. I could name several of them whose names would be very familiar to you if I mentioned them. You are making a very serious mistake if you refuse what I offer you."

Betty closed her eyes for a second and shivered.

Then she opened them and stared at the man above her, breathing in great aches of terror.

There was something in the expression of his sinister face that made her shrink from him.

She knew what price he would demand and exact if she accepted the least favor from him. The experience in Chicago with Fredericks was still fresh in her mind.

And in that short space of time she thought of Jane Wilton. She no longer believed that this innocent young girl had been sent on the road. Poor Jane had met the fate such as stared her in the face at this very moment.

Betty was fighting bravely to hold on to some of her fast waning courage. She knew that if she collapsed she was lost.

It was absolutely imperative that she keep her wits about her. Perhaps help might still come from somewhere if she could keep this man at a distance for some little time.

Yes—she must play for time.

Her bewildered brain was working swiftly to find some way out of this awful predicament.

She was growing desperate and the man read the

determination in her eyes. The smile he gave her was wicked. It told her what she had to expect.

Betty trembled with a feeling of revulsion that suddenly swept over her.

His one hand was resting on her head, while with the other he was trying to force up her chin to meet his gaze.

"What a beautiful minx you are," he cried. "And your beauty is not of the ordinary sort, either. Auburn hair and blue eyes, ah, what a wonderful combination. Julia Marlowe in her palmiest day could not compare with you.

"And you have the artistic nose. I'd give anything to be allowed to put you at the head of a first class company. And I'll do it if you but say the word. I'll make a star out of you."

If he expected Betty to give him an encouraging reply, he was mistaken.

Then suddenly, he bent low and kissed her full upon the lips.

"Oh, you brute!" she panted, breaking away from him and rising. "I wish I could make you understand how I hate you and all your kind!"

"Do you?" He gave a chuckle.

"Yes."

"By God, you are magnificent when you are angry," he exclaimed. "And I bet you can fight if you have to."

"Try me and find out," Betty shot back.

She was facing him now and unafraid, her flashing eyes holding him in check.

Then it seemed that a change came over him.

His attitude became less threatening. The evil smile faded from his face, leaving it sober and almost sad.

"I suppose I am what you called me—a brute and a coward," he said, his voice strangely soft. "And I suppose also it would be utterly useless for me to try and convince you that I am capable of doing anything decent. Yet, I'll make you an offer of marriage.

"You appeal to me more than any woman I have ever met. If you'll marry me, I'll have the ceremony performed within an hour. I'll——"

"Yes, a mock ceremony," Betty interrupted contemptuously.

"No, the real thing," he shot back. "And as my wife I'll make a star out of you, Miss Procter."

She gave him a long glance filled with scorn.

"Do you expect me to believe you?" she cried. "How can you, after your vile deception, expect me to have any confidence in you. It is utterly out of the question. I wouldn't trust you if you swore to marry me on a stack of bibles.

"Now let me tell you something, Mr. Jamison. You can't make any impression on me with your cheap compliments about my good looks and all that sort of bunk. I have been up against this sort of thing before and I know. I am not as green as some of the poor kids roped in by Farrel.

"And before I get through with that man he will be put out of business. As for your offer of marriage, don't make me laugh. I wouldn't be your wife for all the money in the world. You are not a man. You are two steps below an ordinary dog. The best thing you can do is to let me go, and let me go quick."

The man at last comprehended that this girl was not going to be won over by the manner usually employed. She was different from the others and required a different method.

Slowly the fineness he had always used in

handling girls gave way to impatience and anger, aroused by her words.

Suddenly the mask slipped from his face and he stood there revealed as he was.

He stood stripped of the last vestige of manhood. One glance sufficed to warn Betty that she had aroused the devil in him.

"I would suggest that you are a little more careful in your language," he said, his voice coming like a hiss through his clenched teeth. "I am not used to being addressed like that."

"I am not afraid of you," the girl returned quickly, her fighting blood at fever heat.

"Aren't you?" He gave an ugly laugh. "Who is here to prevent me from making love to you any way I chose? You realize that, don't you."

While he spoke, Betty retreated step by step until she found herself against the wall.

To her right was a mantel. As her staying hand wandered upward and rested for a moment on the shelf, it came in contact with something cold and hard.

She knew what it was instantly and could have screamed out loud with joy.

Mr. Jamison, with a cry of rage, sprang forward, but he was too late. And the consequence of a very serious mistake confronted him.

"Back up or I'll fire," the girl warned, pointing the revolver at his head.

His cool smile was confusing.

"Why, you foolish child, it isn't loaded. You can see for yourself that it isn't."

Betty lowered the weapon to investigate.

Like a flash he shot forward and snatched the weapon out of her hand and flung it back on the mantel.

"Really, I couldn't allow you to play with a toy

so dangerous." he laughed. "Now I think I'll have to adopt more stringent measures. You had better listen to reason or I'll——"

As he reached for her again, she struck him in the face.

"Let me go," she cried. "Help."

With both of her arms pinioned behind her back he forced her across the room, then threw her upon the divan.

Betty was no weakling and she fought with all the desperation of a wild creature driven to bay. It seemed, however, that her struggles were of no avail against the brute strength of this man.

Finally she succeeded in freeing one of her hands. She drew back swiftly and struck him a vicious blow which caught him right on the point of the jaw.

He staggered back for a moment, then regained his balance with a vile oath.

"I'll make you pay for this, you cat!" he snarled.

With a rough twist of his hands he forced her face upward until her lips were within easy reach. Then he kissed her once—twice—a dozen times.

At last she shook him off with an almost superhuman effort, and before he could take the first step to pursue her again, she had reached the mantel.

It was the work of a second to snatch the revolver from where it lay. This time it was pointed at his heart.

"Shoot," he dared her. "Shoot."

Chapter 181

A FRIEND

JAMISON belonged to the class of idle rich who from the earliest youth are taught to believe that wealth can buy anything. And he also belonged to the type of men who stoop to almost anything to satisfy their evil desires. Scenes like the one described in the preceding chapter had been enacted before in the same room, with a trembling victim pleading for mercy.

Once before a girl, determined to take care of herself to the extent of carrying a gun, had threatened to kill him, but at the last moment she had dropped the weapon, unnerved and in tears.

But in Betty Procter he met a young woman with enough nerve and self-reliance to back up a threat.

So when he dared her to shoot, throwing his head back and opening his arms, he invited disaster. There was a sharp report and he uttered a cry of pain.

He recoiled a few steps, swearing, and his right arm hanging limp from the shoulder. Her aim was too high for his heart. She had hit him in the shoulder.

"By God!" he said savagely, "I didn't think you had the nerve to do it. I give you credit for your pluck." With his left hand he reached for the wound and drew it back, red with blood. "You winged me alright," he added with a painful smile.

Betty stood there, the gun still raised and smoking. Her blue eyes were ablaze.

"I ought to kill you," she answered, her voice cold and hard. "You have offered me an insult no self-res-

pecting woman can forgive. It is only my horror of taking a human life that keeps me from punishing you as you deserve."

Backing away from him with the still smoking gun aimed at his head, she reached the door. It was locked.

"Open it," she commanded.

The man shook his head.

"Open it, I tell you." The revolver looked menacing pointed as it was to his head.

Again he declined.

"I'll give you two minutes," Betty urged. "If at the expiration of that time the door is not open for me to pass out, I'll shoot to kill."

Jamison wavered for a moment only, then he came forward, and, taking the key from his pocket with a groan of pain, he unlocked the door and swung it open.

The girl faced him, pale, but self-possessed.

"You told me a few minutes ago that I was different from any other woman you ever met," she taunted when she felt quite safe. "Perhaps your other victims failed where I succeeded. I suppose that is the only difference."

A tantalizing smile curled her lips as she added:

"It is very dangerous to leave a loaded revolver lying around where I am, Mr. Fredericks. I hope this experience will teach you a lesson. You are wealthy," a sudden change came into her voice. "You might do a lot of good with your money. You could create happiness where you deliberately spread misery and despair.

"Supposing I had killed you with that one shot I fired?" She saw him shudder. "No doubt I would have been arrested and convicted of murder. But what about you? You still believe in a hereafter, don't you? You would have died with one of the blackest sins on your

soul.

"And now that you have learned a lesson, I am going to teach Farrel one. He sent me here, fully knowing what I had to expect.

"There are nearly a dozen young girls in his clutches who are being deceived the same way I was. I'll put a stop to it if it is the last thing I do on earth. Good by."

Jamison made no attempt to interfere when she slowly passed through the door. Nor did he pay the least attention to the revolver as she flung it at his feet.

He staggered backward and fell into a chair, where he sat, his head bowed and breathing hard.

Betty Procter reached the first floor without encountering anyone. The house was apparently deserted save for the man in the room alone upstairs.

Opening the front door, she took a step on the terrace, then paused.

And then she did something perhaps no other woman would have done under the same circumstances.

She retraced her steps and reentered the house. To her right in the spacious hall was a telephone. Taking the directory she glanced swiftly over the list of physicians and called the one living closest to the Jamison home.

She gave no name, but told the doctor to come at once that Mr. Jamison had been badly hurt and that he could be found on the second floor in the rear of the house.

The evening shades had begun to gather, and the prevailing fog made it almost pitch dark.

Betty breathed a sigh of intense relief as the cool breeze fanned her throbbing temples. It took her some time to find out in what part of the city she was.

Through the kind information of an elderly lady

whom she met at the next corner, the girl was able to find the house in which she roomed.

At first she was tempted to go to the next police station and have Jamison arrested, but upon second thought, she decided to keep the matter to herself.

She realized that he was a man of wealth and influence. What chance had she? Then it occurred to her that he had been sufficiently punished.

Betty was slowly recovering from the shock of her experience and the pallor of her face gave way to a faint blush as she mentally recounted the recent happenings.

She regretted not having asked Mrs. Armond's advise before accepting the position offered her through a fake advertisement.

Suddenly she found herself face to face with a well-dressed man of apparent middle age. She stopped involuntarily to avoid a collision.

The man had evidently misconstrued her move, for he lifted his hat and confronted her with a smile that was far from being pleasant.

"Good evening," he said, his smile broadening into a grin.

Betty Procter gave him a glance of withering scorn and attempted to pass on.

"Haven't we met before?" he asked, barring her way.

"No, we haven't she retorted.

"I am quite sure we have, my pretty maid," the stranger insisted with a smirk. "You look very lonesome. Won't you come with me for a little lunch and a show afterward?"

"I don't know you," Betty tried to pass on.

"Yes, you do," the man insisted. "And I like your looks."

"You are impertinent." The girl's eyes blazed

wrathfully.

"Do you think so?" He laughed and seized Betty by the arm. "Now don't try to be so indignant. It is not becoming."

"Let me go!" Betty Procter was becoming panicky, for there were only a few pedestrians on the street.

The man's hold on her arm tightened.

Fearing a repetition of what had happened but a few minutes ago, she made a desperate effort to wrench herself free.

He was evidently endeavoring to frighten her into accepting his unwelcome attentions.

Suddenly the tall figure of a man turned the corner. He was dressed roughly, but clean. He was young and rather good to look upon.

He came to a quick halt upon perceiving the girl in the grasp of a well dressed stranger. The moment he saw the tears in her eyes, he guessed the truth. Still, somewhat reluctant to interfere, he waited.

"You had better come with me without becoming noisy and making a fuss," he was saying, adroitly aiming to impress the silent onlooker. "I am a detective and you are wanted at headquarters."

The young man's suspicions had been aroused more than ever now.

"If you are a dective, show your badge of authority!" he demanded, stepping up.

"You go about your business!" the other snarled. "This affair does not concern you!"

The young man did not go, however.

Determination was expressed in his face. And there was something about this girl that impressed him most favorably. She was decidedly not of the type usually found prowling about the streets.

"Don't believe a word he says," Betty appealed to

the young fellow. "He is not a detective at all. He told me something entirely different when he stopped me."

"Ah, I thought as much."

Squaring his big shoulders, the young man took a step forward. "You allow this girl to go unmolested or I'll spoil your looks. And you better be on your way."

The answer was an epithet intended to frighten the speaker.

But it had an entirely different effect. A huge fist shot out like a bolt of lightning, and the older man found himself lying flat on his back.

There was a nasty cut under his left eye which bled profusely.

The scoundrel knew that this was most emphatically not the time and place to prolong the quarrel, for he had found more than his match in the tall young fellow.

Scrambling to his feet he beat a hasty retreat and did not stop until he was at a safe distance.

Turning back, he shouted a threat, but the instant the other made a move to follow him, he ran on with vastly increased speed. And this time he did not stop again.

Betty Procter, trembling in every limb, stood there, the tears trickling down her cheeks.

Her noble rescuer smiled encouragingly.

"Don't worry, miss," he said somewhat awkwardly. "You are all right now. That fellow won't bother you again."

She could not utter the words of gratitude that quivered on her lips, but held out her hand in a token of mute thanks.

The young man took it and pressed it, smiling as before.

"If you are still worried, I will see you safely

home," he offered. "I am glad I came in time to punish that man. Last night a lady friend of mine had a similar experience. It seems a decent young girl is not safe alone on the street these days."

They walked on together in silence.

Occasionally Betty stole a sidelong glance at the young man, and she could not help but admire his frank, boyish face.

The distance to Mrs. Armond's rooming house was covered in a few minutes.

"I—I am very grateful to you, sir," she managed to stammer at last when he seemed about to leave her. "Your lady friend is to be congratulated upon having a protector like you."

But instead of going, the young man became even more reluctant. A shade of color mounted his face as he said:

"If it is not asking too much, I would like to meet you again, miss. I know Mrs. Armond, and if you don't mind, I'll call on you sometimes."

Betty was surprised, but not wholly unpleasantly so.

"Wayne is my name—Harold Wayne," he said by the way of introducing himself. "What is yours?"

She told him.

"When can I call?" he inquired, smiling again.

"To-morrow night, if you wish," she replied after a moment's thought.

"Alright, Miss Procter."

He lifted his hat politely and walked on.

She looked after him and noticed how he turned the next corner and gave her a last farewell salute. Then she waved her hand and ran into the house.

In the hall she ran into Mrs. Armond. Muttering a few words of thanks she passed hurriedly on and ran

up the stairs to her little room on the second floor.

And once alone she threw herself across the bed and burst into a flood of tears.

Her slender body was convulsed with the great sobs that came from the innermost recesses of an unhappy heart. The miserable years rose before her like horrible specters.

All she wanted was to be allowed to make an honest living for herself, but those beasts who called themselves men would not permit it. The only bright spot in her life now was Harold Wayne, her newest acquaintance.

He was the only one who had sought to befriend her without offering an insult.

It was the opening and closing of the door which caused her to jump to her feet. Mrs. Armond had entered. She approached Betty quickly, looking puzzled.

"What is the matter, my dear child?" she asked, sincere compassion mirrored in her eyes.

"Oh, I can't tell you." Betty continued to sob.

"I want you to confide in me," the older woman came over and put a hand very gently on the unhappy girl's shoulder. "And I want you to know that I am your friend and willing to help you."

It was this motherly touch that swept away Betty's reticence.

She broke down completely and told her wretched story amid another shower of tears.

Chapter 182

THE HAND OF FATE.

BETTY PROCTER began by relating her marriage to Bob Harding. In detail she described how she lost not only her happy home, but also a father's love and the respect of her friends. She spoke feelingly about her experiences in Detroit, where, after her husband's arrest, she was forced to earn her own living for the first time.

It was really not necessary for her to mention the fact that she, too, had been in prison, although innocent. What she purposely failed to mention was the vile treatment she had received at the hands of her own sister.

Her lips quivered as she recounted the joy which had been hers upon being reunited with her young husband and aged father.

"Oh, I was too happy," she said, swallowing hard. "I thought I would never again know an unhappy hour. But my happiness was too great to last. Dear old dad died and left us nothing. From our beautiful home on Ashland Boulevard, my husband and I moved to a three room flat on a side street."

The unhappy girl paused. But not for long. She was determined to make a clean breast of her whole life's history, omitting nothing in which she had been concerned.

With her face turned aside she told of her meeting with Mr. Fredericks, the Chicago multi-millionaire and the result.

She told how she had been tricked to go to the man's home alone only to fight for her honor.

Her voice was low and occasionally sank to a whisper as she narrated what followed.

"After—after Bob took his own life," she ended. "I hadn't a single friend in the city. Even my own sister and her husband avoided me. I was sick of it all and came to New York."

"And you didn't find New York much different than Chicago, did you?" Mrs. Armond said sympathetically.

"No, I didn't," Betty admitted ruefully. "Men are beasts here, too."

While Betty related her most recent experiences, the old woman listened, compassion in her features. She understood.

"I am not surprised that a man should stop you on the street in New York," Mrs. Armond commented as Betty finished. "That is an every-day occurrence. I am glad this young man, you spoke of, came to your rescue and gave him a beating. Did you learn his name—the young man's, I mean?"

"Yes, it is Wayne—Harold Wayne. And he told me that he knows you, Mrs. Armond. Is that so?"

The latter nodded with a reminiscent smile.

"I know him very well, my dear," she announced. "And he comes from a fine family. But they had their troubles, too. Harold received a splendid education and that is all.

"Like you, he was left penniless when his father died. Some time ago he received word that an uncle who died in the West, had left him an estate near Chicago.

"He went there to take charge of it, but he did not stay long. There was some trouble with a woman. She was married and lived on the adjoining estate with her husband. It must have been rather serious, for Harold kept in hiding for quite a while."

"Near Chicago?" Betty asked, in thought. "I have relatives who have a wonderful estate near Chicago. It is called 'Oak Manor'. The owner, Philip Gordon, is my brother-in-law. He married my sister."

"Gordon?" Mrs. Armond repeated, slanting a quick glance at the speaker. "Why, I believe that is the name of the woman."

Betty turned ghastly white. For a few minutes she was unable to utter a sound. Mrs. Armond became frightened as she looked at her.

Laying a gentle hand on her shoulder she remarked quietly:

"Don't be too much alarmed, my dear child. We may be all wrong. I haven't much of a memory for names. It is more than likely that Harold Wayne will call here in a day or two. You can ask him, or I will. I am sure he won't object to setting us straight."

The following evening Harold Wayne called. As Betty was busy in her room, Mrs. Armond received him.

"Glad to see you, Harold," she exclaimed with a little more warmth than usual. "Why, you are all decked out with that pretty flower on your coat," she added with the mischievous twinkle in her eyes. "Did you come to see me or someone else?"

He blushed as he answered:

"I would like to see Miss Procter. She lives here with you, doesn't she?"

"You know that. You must know it since you were kind enough to bring her home yesterday," came back, that mischievous smile still in evidence on the woman's face. "Just have a seat, and I'll call her."

Wayne dropped into a chair and waited patiently. Fifteen minutes elapsed before Betty came downstairs.

When she entered the room he rose and ran forward to meet her.

"I—I suppose you did not expect me to come so soon, did you, Miss Procter?" he asked, holding her slim white hand in his.

"I am very glad you came," Betty told him, "for I am anxious to talk to you, Mr. Wayne."

The young man flushed with pleasure. He reseated himself and waited expectantly. He was conscious of Betty's scrutinizing gaze. Somehow it annoyed him.

"Mr. Wayne," she began presently. "Mrs. Armond told me that you spent some time in the West—somewhere in the neighborhood of Chicago. I am from Chicago and know quite a few people there.

"I was wondering if——" she paused when she saw the young man suddenly turn pale. "What is the matter?" she inquired, looking straight into his wavering eyes.

It became very obvious that Wayne had no desire to speak about his trip to the West.

"If you and I are to be friends, you must tell me the whole truth," she went on, leaning slightly toward him. "I have the instinctive feeling that you and I know the same people. For instance, I know the Gordons intimately. Did you perhaps meet them?"

Harold Wayne lowered his head.

"Is—is Mrs. Philip Gordon a friend of yours?" he asked with more anxiety than he cared to show.

Betty did not reply at once. For a moment she debated with herself.

If she told him that Alice Gordon was her sister, Wayne would not speak plainly, he might even refuse to tell the truth. Finally she decided to resort to a little fib for very good reasons.

"I heard of the Gordons," she said, watching him closely. "The society gossips spoke well of Philip Gordon, but not quite so well of his wife."

"That doesn't surprise me," he responded with a reminiscent look in his eyes. "Alice Gordon is a dangerous woman. I found that out to my sorrow."

"You did?" Betty's smile was twisted "How?"

Wayne settled back in his chair, reflecting.

"Miss Procter," he said gravely, "I will tell you my experience, but I am afraid you won't think so well of me after I finish my story."

"Let me be the judge of that, Mr. Wayne."

As if desirous of having it over with, the latter began hurriedly:

"An uncle of mine died and left me an estate not far from the city of Chicago This estate was adjoining that of the Gordons. Being a close neighbor, I accepted an invitation to visit them.

"I noticed at once that the Gordons did not live happily together. Philip Gordon was as fine a man as I ever met. His wife was a beautiful woman and a clever actress.

"She seemed to have a grudge against her husband, and wanted to arouse his jealousy She took particular pains to be nice to me, and I, like a fool, fell for her. At her request I consented to meet her one night in the pavillion which stood hidden among those giant oaks on the grounds.

"Someone must have tipped this off to Philip Gordon, for he caught us there. Mrs. Gordon had constantly complained to me about being tired of her husband and the place she called home.

"She wanted to get back to the city and enjoy the gayeties of city life. In the hearing of her husband she implored me to take her away.

"Quite naturally Mr. Gordon took it for granted that his wife and I were lovers. There was a terrible scene. After I had left, he demanded that his wife leave

the place, which she did.

"A night or two later, I happened to meet Gordon on the country road. I can say frankly and without feeling conscience-stricken, that there was never anything serious between Alice and myself. I had merely been the means to arouse her husband's jealousy.

"Phil Gordon jumped from his horse and instantly began to quarrel with me. We got into a fight, I, getting the worst of it. He had me on the ground and was about to put his heel into my face.

"Fearing serious injury, I reached for the gun in my pocket, and shot. Believing that I had killed him, I immediately left the neighborhood and came back to New York.

"I was so frightened that I never wanted to see that part of the country again. I gave my cousin Walter Wayne charge of the estate for a cash consideration.

"I had a letter from Alice Gordon, asking me to join her in Chicago, where she had gone.

"She had gained the impression that I would marry her as soon as her husband procured a divorce. I gave her to understand that I had absolutely no desire to put my head in the marital yoke with a woman like her.

"That was the end of it so far as we two were concerned. Later I learned to my intense relief that Philip Gordon recovered, and also that Alice succeeded in getting back to Oak Manor. That is all, Miss Procter."

Betty's features were contracted with pain. She did not have to be told what her sister Alice was capable of. She knew it from experience.

"Mr. Wayne," she said, her voice quivering, and meeting his anxious gaze without faltering, "I am Alice Gordon's sister."

"You are what?" he gasped, incredulous.

"My sister Alice was a Procter," she informed

him steadily.

Wayne had risen and took a step or two toward the door.

"I—I suppose you don't care to—to speak to me after what I told you, Miss Procter," he declared, the color in his handsome face changing constantly. "I am sorry—very sorry."

She intercepted him quickly.

"So am I sorry," Betty confessed. "But not because of what happened to you out there in the West. I am sorry that you were duped by the woman I have the misfortune to call my sister.

"In my heart I am convinced that you were not to blame. A man who is willing to risk his life to rescue a strange woman in distress, cannot be bad. I shall never forget what you did for me last night."

It was very evident that Harold Wayne was in the grip of a powerful emotion. Occasionally he glanced at the lovely young woman, then at the door.

"No, I don't want you to go," she coaxed. "Since you were frank enough to bare your soul to me, I will tell you what my sister Alice has done to me. Won't you resume your seat? Please do."

For a long moment after both were seated again, Betty hesitated.

She hardly knew where to begin, for her life had been splotched with tragedies.

But was determined to make a clean breast of it all, for she liked Harold Wayne a great deal more than he suspected.

It was not an easy task she was about to impose upon herself. But she tackled it with a grim expression about the corners of her sensitive mouth.

Truthfulness had always been one of Betty's outstanding characteristics. She told of her early and ill-

advised marriage to Bob Harding, her bitter experiences in Detroit which ended in her imprisonment.

Her voice trembled with indignation as she spoke of having been kept a prisoner in the tower at Oak Manor and her sister's attempt to have her removed for good.

The only bright spot was the reunion with her husband and father. Again her voice trembled as she reviewed the subsequent events which brought about Bob Harding's suicide.

"You see," she concluded in a scarcely audible tone, "I am an outcast, for I dare not return to Chicago where my own relatives and former friends believe me to be a dishonored woman.

"That is the thing which hurts me most. I swear before God that I have never done a thing in my life for which I ought to blush."

Harold Wayne was on his feet. With infinite gentleness he placed a hand on Betty's stooped shoulder.

"I believe in you, though the whole world should condemn you," he said tenderly. "Knowing your sister as I do, I realize that she set out purposely to ruin your life. She has ruined mine, and now we are both suffering because of her."

Betty raised her tear-dimmed eyes to his. She could not speak.

"Fate has brought us together," he spoke again very softly. "I want to be your friend, Miss Procter. Will you let me?"

"Yes," whispered Betty.

Had she given him the least encouragement he would have kissed her then and there. But Betty was not the kind of a young woman to welcome familiarities on short acquaintance. She stepped back and gave Harold Wayne a smile that told volumes.

Continued in next number

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